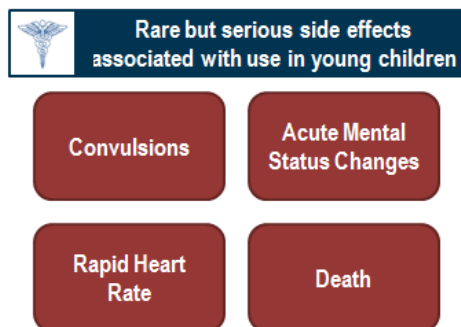


Over the Counter Cough and Cold Medication Use in Children

As the temperatures drop and we enter the holiday season, it is inevitable that cold and flu season will also arrive. It is important to remember that the common cold and flu are caused by viruses. These viruses are present in droplets in the air we breathe or on every day items such as doorknobs, telephones, and keyboards. Seasonal influenza, or the flu, has a sudden onset of symptoms compared to colds, which often develop over time. The flu usually presents with a fever, severe exhaustion, aches, decreased appetite and chills, whereas a cold usually does not. Since both are caused by a virus, antibiotics do not work against them. In fact, there is no cure for the flu or common cold. While over the counter (OTC) medications can help alleviate cold and flu symptoms, it is important to note that these medicines can be dangerous, especially when administered to young children.

- In 2008, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a public health advisory recommending that OTC cough and cold medications not be used in children under the age of two due to the risk of rare but serious side effects including convulsions, rapid heart rate, acute mental status changes and death.
- Additional agencies, such as the Consumer Healthcare Products Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have issued their own warnings regarding use of cough and cold medications in children up to four years of age.



Key Tips to Remember¹:

- Use medicines only as directed: Read the labels to make sure the product is appropriate for your child's age.
- Weigh the benefit of treating the symptoms against the risk of any adverse affects.
- Be aware of the possible side effects so you can identify if it is truly the disease that is causing a symptom.
- Speak to your health care professional and ask questions prior to giving medications to your child.

To help raise awareness for the dangers associated with OTC cough and cold medicine, the Health Analysis (HA) Department at the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) developed targeted outreach materials for health care providers across Navy Medicine. By partnering with the medical community, the department hopes to reduce the frequency of this potentially harmful clinical practice. Improving compliance with clinical guidelines has the potential to improve clinical quality and reduce unnecessary spending.

Consider these safe alternatives to alleviate your child's cold symptoms²:

- Saline (saltwater) drops in the nose to relieve nasal congestion
- Petroleum jelly under the nose to soothe raw skin
- A cool-mist humidifier to increase air moisture
- A warm bath or heating pad to ease aches and pains
- Steam from a hot shower to help your child breathe easier
- Water or juice to replenish fluids

HA provides expertise and leadership to improve the value of Navy health care and operational force readiness through clinical health analysis, epidemiologic, and evidence-based methods. For more on NMCPHC's Health Analysis Department visit: <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-analysis/>.

¹ <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm164427.htm>

² http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial_viral/cold.html?tracking=P_RelatedArticle#

